

If Jesus is the Bread of Life – What Happens If You Don't Like Bread?

(John 6:35, 41-51)

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴²They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' ⁴³Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

Introducing the Theme

- Do you like bread – I love bread
- Not sure I have met a person who does not like bread
- Travelling around the world it is fun to experience how different people do bread
- Cartoon: Each of us will fill in the blanks in bread bingo
- We all know that all bread is not equal
- Some is industrial, some bread can be too healthy and some is too die for
- We know that every culture believes their bread is the best
- However, we have learnt, that bread does not like everyone

Illustration: Google Translate

- Gluten, yeast and weird preservers all have their differing toll on different people
- Let alone the vast range of options and preferences that are at play
- What is bread is now an Aristotelean conundrum even before you overlay it with metaphysical comfort

Bread: The Elixir of Life

- **Illustration: Depressive existential period**

I saw my father undergo a range of moments of existential fragility whether fueled by business not going well or midlife crisis, disappointing children and so forth. At such times, like his mother, he took to the bed if not literally at least metaphorically. One of his 'go to' coping mechanisms was giving full expression to his uber hypochondria. He would tally up lots of appointments with his doctor – then other doctors for a second opinion. I need medical tests - I need a prescription - I need more medical tests. I need different prescriptions.

- Fair to say in our current milieu we would identify this as mental health.
- If you were a doctor, my father was one of those annoying people that would feel free to ask medical questions whatever the context...

Illustration: Sally's aunt was a doctor (photo)

Can you spot which one is Shirley? One of the first graduates
Melbourne University

Well at a family do my father accosted her during one of his low points. She was kind and engaged. I do not want to be unkind, but I think she had recently landed on the role of allergies in health as something that had come across her radar to take into account. She suggested to my father allergies may be at play and sent him for a battery of tests which my dad embraced with gusto.

Of course, nothing clear came up so Sally's aunt wondered if it might be a more tricky allergy such as gluten or yeast based allergy. Perhaps he could give up bread for a while – Dad loved bread and he ate lots. At that point whatever satisfaction he was getting from the attention of a doctor and the access to medical tests ceased - giving up bread was a bridge to far. Hard to underestimate the role of bread for people who have experienced famine, depression and war as my father did.

The result was that he politely stopped consulting with Sally's aunt – I am sure Shirley's quality of life improved. And funnily enough that provided a circuit breaker and Dad re-found his rhythm as he felt he had a close escape from having to give up bread.

How Does Jesus Feed You

Within this context it is a bold claim that John offers that Jesus is the bread of life. For John, Jesus is essential and even exclusive to make sense of the divine and all of life.

This is a challenging view – I personally think that trying to make sense of Jesus as essential as bread is worthy and, dare I say it, valid – at least valid in John’s time. However we know that not all views of Jesus as essential are equal or helpful if it comes with a dose of religious imperialism or dismissive exceptionalism that is less than optimal. How to affirm devotion as followers of the God of Jesus while avoiding the conundrum of religious imperialism and dismissive exceptionalism is an ongoing challenge.

Personally I find when chatting with folk the issue that prickles most folk is not the metaphysical or the exclusive claims – as tricky as they can be for some. What is tricky is actually how we portray Jesus – who is this Jesus as the bread of life is the first question that people – what do I mean?

Read a fabulous book recently *Stone Yard Devotion* by Charlotte Wood, describing a woman who facing grief and life crisis who without any real conviction attends a retreat run by nuns. It is clear she is short of belief in Jesus - let alone that he can feed her. Yet she finds much of the retreat begs questions of meaning, ritual and purpose that she would love to be able to feed on – insightful, challenging and weirdly inspiring.

Quote: *Stone Yard Devotion* (Charlotte Wood)

What I could not tolerate was the 'falling in love with Jesus' talk that I knew would come next and it did. I find it nauseating; surely this life should be composed of something more sober than that. Something austere, and momentous, and powerful. Close attention, hard thinking. A wrestling, to subdue . . . what? Ego. The self. Hatred. Pride. But no, instead we have... simpering that they are here because I fell in love with Jesus and want to live with him in heaven. As if they're talking about some teen idol crush. I have learned not to roll my eyes but there are times it is nearly impossible.

Jesus as your boyfriend may bring some insight into Jesus as the Bread of life. And for some this quasi-mystical connection really works and dare I say it – is valid – who am I to say sure that is the richest reading of John.

What I think John is offering that Jesus can be the Bread of life for anyone and everyone – however you need to be at peace with how Jesus is Bread of life for you.

Conclusion

Our obligation is to present what is appropriate for our time and to present Jesus as the Bread of Life that makes senses for you and for those who know you

be it religious

be it mystical
be it metaphysical
be it theological
be it mundane
be it profound

Personally, I like my Bread of life dosed with a little Trinitarian metaphysics and grounded in socio-political realities.

Whatever metaphysical elements to John's view of Jesus as the Bread of life, John is not only offering a metaphysical and theological view.

The evocation of the Jewish people fleeing Egypt and being fed by manna from God enriches my view of Jesus as the Bread of life.

Who provides bread is John's e starting point.

Is it your oppressor? (Egypt for the Jews maybe Coles / Woolworths in for us)

Is it the state?

Is it yourself?

is it your God

It begs the questions that far too many people in our world ask everyday

Will we have bread today?

Will there be enough bread today?

Will I have the same bread questions tomorrow?

Who provides bread is a justice, political and economic issue – for John these are all intertwined in our devotion as followers of Jesus.

As well as a taking in the metaphysical, religious and theological – Jesus as the Bread of life also requires justice, politics and economics in our devotion.